



Clinical Psychology

What is Clinical Psychology?

Clinical psychology is the *practical application* of psychological knowledge to help people with many types of problems that occur in their lives, including mental or physical health difficulties, difficulties in relationships with others, or other issues that create distress or unhappiness. Clinical psychology works to help people maximise their happiness and fulfilment in their life.

What do clinical psychologists do?

Clinical psychologists work to assist people, families and systems to be healthier, happier, and more fulfilled. Clinical Psychologists do this by using their understanding of psychological theory and therapy to help the person, family, or system to better understand any difficulties and/or to develop strategies to help them reduce or eliminate these difficulties and to increase their strengths and well-being.

Clinical psychologists do not use medication to do this. They use an approach of getting to understand how the person or system got to being how they are now, and then working with them to develop and use non-medication approaches to assist the person to change in ways they wish to change. This is usually achieved by talking with the person and others involved, and then using this and other information (including psychological testing) to develop an understanding of the situation, and then working with the person or system to

develop a shared "formulation" or understanding of that situation.

The Clinical Psychologists' approach includes, but is not limited to:

- Assessment to help better understand the situation and help the person to develop their own strategies for dealing with it.
- Helping the person or system to learn and use skills that will help them to get things as they want them to be.
- Helping people to change their environment, their own habits or behaviours, and the patterns of those around them, in ways that will support more wellbeing and better

What is a clinical psychologist?

Clinical psychologists have specialised in learning about how the feelings, actions, beliefs, experiences and culture of people affect the way they live. They have learned how to listen to and understand people's emotional and psychological problems and strengths and how to help people make changes in their lives. They use the results of psychological research to inform their understanding of what is most likely to help each person in their unique situation to be able to make things better.

Clinical psychologists have studied psychology at University, usually for at least six or seven years. The university qualifications that are the basis of clinical psychology in New Zealand are the Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology or the Doctor of Clinical Psychology degree, a person trained in clinical psychology will have received both theoretical and practical supervised training in psychotherapy.

All clinical psychologists must be registered with the New Zealand Psychologist's Board, and hold the Clinical Vocational Scope of Practice.

How does Clinical Psychology differ from related professions?

"What is the difference between clinical psychology and other types of psychological therapy?" may seem like a simple question. The answer, however, is not at all simple because psychology can be *applied* in many different ways. Some persons who study psychology end up practising as counsellors, some practice as psychotherapists, and some practice as psychologists. Some people who claim to offer these services have done little or no formal training in psychology, or have studied psychology as part of a broader education (such as psychiatry).

Psychiatry

Psychiatry is a medical specialty, in the same way that cardiology, paediatrics, and orthopaedic surgery are medical specialties. Psychiatry is the medical specialty that deals with mental illness. Like other medical specialists, psychiatrists have to undertake a basic medical degree and then complete advanced training in their particular area of specialty. In New Zealand a major difference in the training of psychiatrists and clinical psychologists centres on the use of medication for treatment. Psychiatrists prescribe medications, clinical psychologists do not. Some psychiatrists have a strong interest in psychological therapy and may give much emphasis to this in their training and practice. However, it is probably true in general that psychiatrists have particular strengths in understanding the biological processes associated with mental health problems and the use of medication as a treatment. In practice, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists often work with similar clients, and often work together.

Psychotherapy

In New Zealand, psychotherapy commonly refers to psychological therapies that are based on so-called psychodynamic theories of human behaviour and personality. These theories emphasise the importance of unconscious mental processes, early childhood experiences, and the role of emotions in shaping behaviour. However, many psychotherapists also use other techniques or a mix of different techniques.

The level of training of different people who work as psychotherapists varies widely. There is no official registration process for psychotherapists in New Zealand, although this is in the process of being established.

Counselling

The concept of counselling has actually been around for ages, and it reflects the need for one person to seek out help or advice from another person. Counselling as a professional occupation arose not from the clinic but from more social settings. It focuses on helping people resolve problems or role issues related to work or school or family matters.

Here are some general characteristics of counselling

- It is concerned with "normal" problems rather than mental health problems
- It is concerned with role functioning, with choices to be made, and with actions to be taken
- It is more concerned with present events than with past events

Counselling in New Zealand has not traditionally been associated with qualifications in psychology, or with any particular form of training. This is changing, with various courses in counselling now on offer, including ones with

tertiary degree status. There is no official registration process for counsellors.

Coaching

Recently, some people have begun advertising themselves as providers of *coaching*. Coaching, like counselling, is meant to help "healthy" clients. Instead of helping them solve problems, coaching focuses on helping persons utilise their abilities more effectively than they have previously. Advertising jargon would call this "achieving your full potential."

Here are some general characteristics of coaching:

- It can focus on personal work, but it is usually used in business settings with executives
- It tends to help persons achieve personal and business goals
- No license or official registration is needed to practice coaching

Registration

Only psychologists who are registered with the [New Zealand Psychologists Board](#) under Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act 2003 (HPCA Act) and its subsequent amendments may call themselves a psychologist.

Only those psychologists who have completed appropriate qualifications in Clinical Psychology and who have been registered in a [Clinical Scope](#) of practice may call themselves a "Clinical Psychologist".

It is not uncommon for some counsellors, psychotherapists, and psychologists to attempt to treat problems for which they have not been specifically-or adequately-trained. To be confident about their quality of care, consumers need to know what degree, what *registration* (if any), and what training the person has received.

You should feel free to ask your psychologist (or other health professional) whether they are registered and what their qualifications are.

Supervision

All clinical psychologists should be in supervision. This means they will meet regularly with colleague(s) to discuss the therapy and assessment work they are doing. They will keep information that identifies you confidential, and the supervisor will also respect your privacy.

Supervision allows the quality of the psychologist's work with you to be checked. It is a time when another psychologist can ask questions that can help your psychologist expand and deepen their understanding of your problems and of working with you. Supervision helps to keep the standard of psychology practice high.

For more information check out

www.nzccp.co.nz